

X1 – EXchanging Worldviews, 1: EXposing Ignorance

Dear: For these (many!) X-chapters, besides showing you more about the worldview of scientific humanists, I've set myself the (huge!) goal of trying to finish what I started back in the P-chapters, that is, suggesting ways that humanity might make more progress toward peace and prosperity. More specifically, whereas the worldview of scientific humanists is that this universe is entirely natural and whereas experience has taught us that the only way to gain knowledge and understanding about this universe is by application of the scientific method, therefore the goal of these X-chapters is to explore possibilities of applying the scientific method to help solve humanity's problems, thereby leading to more peace and prosperity.

But before beginning the undertaking, I probably should show you what I review for "X" when I'm walking – in large measure, just to "get it out of the way"! Further, I probably should admit that, over the years, what I review for "X" when I'm walking has evolved. Decades ago, when I first clearly saw the "EXcrement" that all clerics are selling, then when I came to "X", I would vent some of my anger. But as the years rolled on and it became clearer to me that most low-level clerics are just a bunch of well-meaning dimwits wallowing in moldy science concocted by savages, my anger somewhat subsided.

And I wrote "somewhat", because I continue to be angry at the worldwide damage such dimwits do, promoting ignorance. Moreover, certainly my anger hasn't subsided against essentially all religious leaders – most of whom seem sufficiently intelligent to understand that their organizations are promoting ignorance, but they continue to do so, almost certainly because they're hooked on the perks, prestige, and power their con games provide them. Consequently, and especially during the past decade when I've been writing this book for you, what I normally review for "X" is something similar to the following, in part to try to stimulate me to finish this book:

- X: EXpose the clerics; EXcuse the people – help them (especially the children) to exchange worldviews; EXplain that the new HI-GOD is*
- *Helping Innocents Get Over Dogma, or*
 - *Helping Intelligence Guide Our Descendants, or*
 - *Helping Intelligence Go On – by Doing!*

Depending on my mood, I might expand the above with something similar to the following:

EXpose the cling-on clerics of the world: promoting primitive science for their own profit; polluting children's minds with moldy science that belongs in the trash can of human mistakes; too enamored with the genitals of foolish women and innocent kids to have intercourse with the universe; too lazy or too stupid or too committed to pursuing power and their perverted pleasures to learn what progress science has made during the thousands of years since they grabbed power and tortured people for thinking for themselves. A case in point is the current "war on terror": it's not a war against terrorism but a war against ignorance, epitomized by the god idea (espoused by both clerics and stupid politicians, such as Bush, Blair, and Ahmadinejad).

EXcuse the poor people whose minds have been polluted with the primitive worldviews of the clerics. Fifty per cent of the people have below-average intelligence: they want simple answers; therefore, they're easily swindled by clerics and politicians. Many of the others have sufficient intelligence to see through the clerics' con games, but they're too committed to indoctrination from their parents, too busy to question authority, too committed to their mistakes, too frightened, too lonely, or too... whatever to face reality. Help them (especially the children) to exchange worldviews. Otherwise, just excuse them, avoid them if they become a pain – yet, work to prevent such fools and cowards from leading any society.

EXplain to kids the need to think for themselves: promote the scientific method, critical thinking, holding beliefs only as strongly as relevant evidence warrants, a more sensible worldview, and the networking of international groups committed to helping humanity. Challenge kids to help solve the problems of the world: decimate all religions, fight other viruses such as AIDS, cure the disease known as nationalism, defuse the population bomb, protect nature, strive for sustainable development, and so on, including installing an asteroid shield to protect the Earth. And thus the new HI GOD: Helping Intelligence Go On – by Doing!

To begin to explain what I mean by this new HI GOD (Helping Intelligence Go ON – by Doing) and to provide another illustration of what I meant in the previous chapter when I wrote "wisdom is rarely found in words,

sometimes wisdom can be found in stories, but most commonly, wisdom is in doing – as is, unfortunately, much stupidity”, let me quote another of Aesop’s fables,¹ to which I’ve added a few notes in square brackets.

The Trees Under the Protection of the Gods: The Gods, according to an ancient legend, [chose] certain trees to be under their special protection: Jupiter [or Zeus] chose the oak, Venus the myrtle, Apollo the laurel, Cybele the pine, and Hercules the poplar. Minerva [the goddess of wisdom, and unfortunately, also of war], wondering why they had preferred trees not yielding fruit, inquired [about] the reason for their choice. Jupiter replied, “It is lest we should seem to covet the honor [because of] the fruit.” But said Minerva, “Let anyone say what he will; the olive is more dear to me on account of its fruit.” Then said Jupiter, “My daughter, you are rightly called wise, for unless what we do is useful, the glory of it is vain.”

Stated differently, Dear: wisdom is to be found not in words but in the fruits of what we do.

There’s similar wisdom in a koan that I remember only vaguely. Recall that a koan is a puzzle posed to a student by a Zen master, so that the student might reach “enlightenment” (or understanding). The koan was something similar to the following.

The student had been studying at the master’s school for years. Eventually, he approached the master and (with courage probably impelled by frustration) asked: “Master, when will you teach me the secret to enlightenment?” The master responded: “Have you finished your lessons and done your chores?” “Yes master,” responded the student. “Good,” replied the master, “then go and help wash the dishes.”

Similarly, Dear, don’t use words to tell your mother that you love her; instead, go and help wash the dishes (or similar).

But be careful, Dear, because there can also be much stupidity in just doing. You can show kids that “might makes right”, but try to show them that “right makes might”. Further, show them that ‘right’ depends on one’s objectives; show them that the only scientifically sound objectives of ‘might’ and ‘power’ are to help intelligence continue; and show them that all of the above is of no significance, it’s all a bunch of silly words, unless and until people get working. As the philosopher, humanist, and Emperor of Rome Marcus Aurelius wrote to himself almost 2,000 years ago in his

¹ From <http://classics.mit.edu/>.

Meditations:² “No longer talk at all about the kind of [person] that a good [person] ought to be, but be such.”

Similar wisdom is given in the Talmud (the Jewish commentary on the Old Testament or Torah): “The highest form of wisdom is kindness.” That assessment, however, also needs to be qualified: as I emphasized in an earlier chapter, it’s necessary to apply kindness with keenness; helping can hurt, big time! For me, Robert Ingersoll once again said it best:

To love justice, to long for the right, to love mercy, to pity the suffering, to assist weak, to forget wrongs and remember benefits – to love the truth, to be sincere, to utter honest words, to love liberty, to wage relentless war against slavery in all its forms, to love wife and child and friend, to make a happy home, to love the beautiful in art, in nature, to cultivate the mind, to be familiar with the mighty thoughts that genius has expressed, the noble deeds of all the world, to cultivate courage and cheerfulness, to make others happy, to fill life with the splendor of generous acts, the warmth of loving words, to discard error, to destroy prejudice, to receive new truths with gladness, to cultivate hope, to see the calm beyond the storm, the dawn beyond the night, to do the best that can be done and then to be resigned – this is the religion of reason, the creed of science. This satisfies the heart and brain.

And although, once again when I read Ingersoll, my tendency is to stop typing – thinking not only that nothing more need be written but also that nothing else should be written (out of respect for what he wrote), yet let me push on, because I feel the need to try to “tie up some loose ends” – that I left dangling, not Ingersoll!

In particular, I left many topics dangling in earlier chapters, on subjects from personal growth to politics and from values associated with different worldviews to prospects for social justice and world peace. If I can accomplish my goal of tying up some of these loose ends in these **X**-chapters, then maybe the **Y**-chapters (more directly addressed to you) will be more beneficial to you as you head out to live your own life, pursuing your own goals and therefore, your own set of values.

First, though, I should add (although it may not be of much interest to you!) that I’ve had substantial difficulty accomplishing (and even starting on!) the self-imposed task for this chapter of “tying up some loose ends”. I’m willing to admit to many “causes” of my difficulty: 1) In earlier chapters, I left so many “loose ends” dangling! 2) I left them dangling, earlier, because

² Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/>

generally they're so difficult to tie up! 3) It's difficult to make the resulting "exposition" flow smoothly – I'm afraid the result just appears to be an attempt to tie up a bunch of unconnected loose ends! As for other "causes" of my difficulty (such as my incompetence as a writer, my lack of knowledge of the subject material, the fact that my stomach is causing me troubles...), I'll not list them further.

Fortunately for me, however, I finally found a way to bring at least a little order – a little coherence – to the mess, thanks in large measure to Aesop and to Socrates but also in part, as a result of my plan to break this chapter into sections. But I don't plan to explain what I mean by that last sentence. Instead, I plan to leave the explanation as still another "loose end" – to be tied up by doing!

EXamining Problems

I'll start by quoting another of Aesop's fables. As I've already written, many of Aesop's analogies contain substantial wisdom; yet, as I've also already written, care is needed when using any "argument from analogy". To illustrate what I mean, consider another of Aesop's fables, this one entitled³

The Milk-Woman and Her Pail: A farmer's daughter was carrying her pail of milk from the field to the farmhouse, when she fell a-musing. "The money for which this milk will be sold, will buy at least three hundred eggs. The eggs, allowing for all mishaps, will produce two hundred and fifty chickens. The chickens will become ready for the market when poultry will fetch the highest price, so that by the end of the year I shall have money enough from my share to buy a new gown. In this dress I will go to the parties, where all the young fellows will propose to me, but I will toss my head and refuse them every one." At this moment she tossed her head in unison with her thoughts, when down fell the milk pail to the ground, and all her imaginary schemes perished in a moment.

Similarly, for those of us who have concluded from a massive amount of data that religions have caused and continue to cause enormous problems in the world and that the source of these problems is ignorance, we can be heartened thinking that we could educate religious people to abandon their delusions, hoping that their "imaginary schemes perished in a moment." But such an analogy can easily delude: in reality, cultural inertia is enormous and personal commitments can be almost impenetrable. Consequently,

³ Again from <http://classics.mit.edu/>.

convincing people to change their worldviews can be enormously difficult. Yet, humanists still try. As Isaac Asimov responded, when asked why he fights religion with no hope for victory:

Because we must. Because we have the call. Because it is nobler to fight for rationality without winning than to give up in the face of continued defeats. Because whatever true progress humanity makes is through the rationality of the occasional individual – and because any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts.

Simultaneously, many religious people proceed with equal resolution to try to convince “heathens, infidels, unbelievers, and atheists” (such as a certain set of your grandparents!), as well as to convince members of other religions, to convert to their religion. And thus, for example, the sad sight of programmed Mormon “automatons” (or, more accurately, “automata”) heading out on their “missions”.

But, Dear, I hope you notice a major distinction between what such “proselytizers” promote and what Isaac Asimov was describing. He was committed to educating people about humanism for the help that they might provide humanity (“any one individual we may win for the cause may do more for humanity than a hundred thousand who hug superstition to their breasts”). In contrast, if you appropriately discount the propaganda, you’ll find that the primary reason why religious sects proselytize is for religious people to assemble a larger herd in which they can feel comfortable (consistent with their “herd instinct”) and for religious leaders to gain more paying customers in their pews (consistent with their instinct to avoid working for a living).

Yet, Dear, as I mentioned in earlier chapters (and as you certainly know anyway), all the world’s problems aren’t “caused” by religions. I don’t want even to try to list all the problems of the world and their “causes”, but just to get you thinking about some such problems, consider:

- Natural disasters – although such problems are (by definition) caused by natural processes, more than “normal” damages can (in many cases) usually be traced to ignorance (living near volcanoes, in areas frequently hit by hurricanes, in earthquake-prone territories, etc.)
- Human-caused disasters (from airplane crashes and hazardous pollution to the severity of natural disasters, such as from floods, forest fires,

* Go to other chapters *via*

desertification, etc., as well as malnutrition, starvation, the severity and propagation of some diseases, etc.)

- Pollution and depletion of natural resources (caused by too many people foolishly and irresponsibly consuming too much)
- The burdens on workers of health-care costs of old people – burdens that, in turn, arise from errors in representation in “representative democracies”: not “taxation without representation”, but representation without taxation (or without commensurate taxation)
- A huge variety of social injustices (other than those caused by religions)
- Wars – other than those caused by religious zealots.

But beyond such problems, surely most people would agree (at least initially) that religions “cause” a substantial fraction of the world’s problems – of course excluding their own religion from such an indictment!

In earlier chapters (especially in the **P**-chapters), I already addressed some of the problems religions cause individuals, groups, and societies and I don’t plan to repeat that analysis here. Instead, I want to broaden the scope to include more problems caused by religions (especially social injustices and wars) – topics that I felt I couldn’t adequately address in the **P**-chapters (in part because I had yet to address differences in worldviews). My emphasis will be on such problems caused by religions, because I’m still trying to answer a certain grandchild’s question about why I don’t “believe” in gods.

In particular, I want to show you more about my “belief” (or better, assessment of the data) that religion has been a horrible curse on humanity. As Daniel Defoe (the author of *Robinson Crusoe*) wrote:

...of all the plagues with which mankind are cursed, ecclesiastic tyranny’s the worst.

In addition, I want to dig deeper into “the causes” of essentially all of the world’s problems, to show you that their “root cause” is actually not religion but ignorance. In later **X**-chapters, I’ll propose that “the solution” to all such problems is better education: to recognize that this “human system” has only one obvious prime objective: to promote what most distinguishes us as humans, i.e., intelligence. In turn, this “solution” requires exchanging

* Go to other chapters *via*

<http://zenofzero.net/>

worldviews, from those based on ignorance (e.g., all religions) to those based on expanding and exploiting knowledge (i.e., scientific humanism).

And at the outset, let me admit (and warn you!) that many times in what follows, you'll probably conclude that I've "lost my cool". As I've written in earlier chapters, I know from experience that I have a low tolerance for ignorance. But, Dear, let me also remind you, once again, about what Socrates said, "*There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.*" Also, consider Thoreau's statement (from *Walden*, 1854): "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root." Consequently, Dear, if you decide that I'm "losing my cool", consider the possibility that it's not just that I have a low tolerance for ignorance, but that, similar to most people, I have a low tolerance for evil – and sometimes I find myself "striking at the root" in anger.

Further, Dear, I know that 'good' and 'evil' are meaningless without reference to some objective, but throughout what follows, I tacitly adopt and even wholeheartedly support the objective dictated by our DNA molecules: to continue evolving! Thus, in what follows, please feel free to replace the word 'good' with the phrase "good for the continuing evolution of life" and to replace the words 'evil' or 'bad' with "evil (or bad) for the continuing evolution of life – in particular, bad for humanity".

EXposing Ignorance

Of course, you may disagree that ignorance is evil [for the continuing evolution of life], but as I wrote in an earlier chapter, probably it was soon after humans first came down out of the trees (if not before!) that humans learned that knowledge is good and that ignorance is bad. Those who didn't learn that lesson didn't survive. Thereby, primitive humans learned (as had other animals) that the fundamental bases of "good" and "evil" (i.e., the fundamental bases of human values) are usually "just" our dual survival goals: survival of ourselves and our "families" – in whatever manner the concept of "family" was first recognized.

Yet, as far as I know, it was Socrates (469–399 BCE) who first recognized that humans had adopted, as a "fundamental principle of life", that knowledge is good and that ignorance is bad. According to Diogenes Laertius, in his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (written ~600 years after Socrates' death!), Socrates stated:

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<http://zenofzero.net/>

There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.

As I've stated before, however, I expect that Socrates would have been a little more careful about what he said and, instead of the above, would have said something closer to: "There is only one good, [seeking] knowledge, and one evil, [embracing] ignorance", or maybe, "There is only one good, willingness to learn, and one evil, refusal."

Subsequently, others echoed Socrates' idea. For example, written approximately 500 years after Socrates, *The Gospel of Philip* states:⁴

Ignorance is the mother of all evil.

Approximately 2,000 years after Socrates, Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) wrote:

I count religion but a childish toy,
And hold there is no sin but ignorance.

In the 1600's in Europe, when Catholics and Protestants were at each other's throats (literally), apparently a common insult that both sides used (and it was used even by those who tried to moderate between the two sides) was:

Ignorance is the mother of devotion.

But perhaps Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749 – 1832) stated it best:

Nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action.

As examples, Dear, consider the Islamic terrorists who flew hijacked planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, the Pope prohibiting Catholics from using birth-control devices, Mormon discrimination against Blacks, Hitler's anti-Semitism, the Inquisition, the racism of the Ancient Jews, and on and on: all are cases of "ignorance in action".

⁴ As I mentioned in earlier chapters, *The Gospel of Philip* is one of the Gnostics' gospels that Christian clerics tried to destroy ~2,000 years ago and that was recently found buried in the Egyptian desert near Nag Hammadi. You can find a copy of it on the internet either by typing "Gospel of Philip" or "Nag Hammadi Library" in a good internet "search engine". And let me add, here, that the problem with the Gnostics and the Gnostics' Jesus (where the word 'gnostic' means "of or having knowledge", from the Greek word 'gnosis' meaning 'knowledge') is that their claimed "knowledge" was actually just more primitive ignorance, i.e., still more supernatural jabberwocky.

Now, Dear, of course I'm aware that, many times, I've already quoted Socrates' statement that "there is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance", but I think that it's so important, I hope you'll reconsider it. If you do, then maybe you'll conclude that it needs a caveat. Giving him the benefit of any doubt, I suspect he meant that evil is not in ignorance, itself, but in actions that result from ignorance. To emphasize this point, let me quote from a web page about Socrates created by Richard Hooker:⁵

The one positive statement that Socrates seems to have made is a definition of virtue (*areté*): 'virtue is knowledge.' If one knows the good, one will always do the good. It follows, then, that anyone who does anything wrong doesn't really know what the good is.

Thereby, it appears that Socrates' point was something amazingly powerful (and amazingly generous to people): that people commit evil only out of ignorance – if they possessed appropriate knowledge, if they had more understanding, their actions would be good.

Yet, although Socrates saw that "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance", he almost demolished the effectiveness of his idea with another statement, also attributed to him by Diogenes Laertius: "I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance." If that were so, if even Socrates knew nothing but his own ignorance, then the outlook for "good" seems rather bleak! In reality, however, the situation isn't nearly so bleak as might seem at first. For one, there are hints that Socrates was merely being modest (for example, Plato attributes to him the statement: "Yes... I know many things, but not anything of much importance"); in reality, he obviously possessed substantial understanding. In addition, I expect that Socrates meant: "I know nothing [with certainty] but the fact of my ignorance." If so, then his statement is consistent with what I mentioned a few chapters ago: in "open systems" (such as this world we live in!) nothing can be known with certainty – even that statement! If that's what Socrates meant, then it again reveals his brilliance.

Further, though, statements such as "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance" are not to be taken as "truths" only as "principles". And similarly, Dear, nothing in this book (or any book!) should be treated as "truth"; the best one can hope to find anywhere is "just" some principles (i.e., useful summaries of substantial quantities of data – and to be "useful",

⁵ At <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/GREECE/SOCRATES.HTM>.

any principle must have had all its predictions validated). In turn, it's easy to agree with Aristotle, who wrote in his *Metaphysics*: "Clearly, then, wisdom is knowledge about certain principles and causes." Thereby, I would argue that Socrates' assessment "There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance" contains wisdom, for it usefully summarizes a substantial quantity of data, and as I'll try to show you, it contains predictions that can and have been validated.

Yet Socrates' statement can cause confusion: if "best vs. worst" or "good vs. evil" are derived from "knowledge vs. ignorance", then to understand "good vs. evil", obviously we must first understand what is meant by "knowledge vs. ignorance". This raises a host of questions, such as: What does 'knowledge' mean? What is 'knowledge'? What is 'ignorance'? If we are 'ignorant', what are we 'ignoring'? As far as I know, Socrates never resolved such questions adequately.

In contrast, one of his Socrates' contemporaries saw the most important distinction between knowledge and ignorance. Thus, the "father of modern medicine", Hippocrates (c.460–400 BCE), wrote in his little book entitled *The Law*:

There are in fact two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter, ignorance.

Hippocrates' statement, however, probably needs a caveat – or should be read in context – because whether or not some 'opinion' leads to 'ignorance' (and therefore, according to Socrates, whether it leads to evil) depends on what the 'opinion' is based. Unfortunately for humanity, Hippocrates apparently didn't provide a succinct statement about how to gain knowledge. But from his many books (all of which are short and all of which are available at the wonderful web site <http://classics.mit.edu/>), it's clear that to gain knowledge in medicine, Hippocrates applied the scientific method and that he was most opposed to those who practiced medicine based on opinions that had no scientific bases.

Justification for my statement can be seen clearly in Hippocrates' book *On the Sacred Diseases*, in which he severely criticizes those who held the opinion that "diseases" such as epilepsy were "caused" by the gods (similar to opinions held by contemporaneous Egyptians and Jews and then, hundreds of years later, by Christians, who held that various diseases were

caused by “evil spirits”). In contrast, after studying the function of the brain (no doubt from anatomical studies of cadavers), Hippocrates advocated that these so-called “sacred diseases” were caused by problems in the patient’s brain. He wrote:

It is thus with regard to the disease called Sacred:⁶ it appears to me to be nowise more divine nor more sacred than other diseases, but has a natural cause from the originates like other affections. Men regard its nature and cause as divine from ignorance and wonder, because it is not at all like to other diseases. And this notion of its divinity is kept up by their inability to comprehend it, and the simplicity of the mode by which it is cured, for men are freed from it by purifications and incantations...

They who first referred this malady to the gods appear to me to have been just such persons as the conjurors, purificators, mountebanks, and charlatans now are, who give themselves out for being excessively religious, and as knowing more than other people. [What a great description of all clerics!] Such persons, then, using the divinity as a pretext and screen of their own inability to afford any assistance, have given out that the disease is sacred, adding suitable reasons for this opinion, they have instituted a mode of treatment which is safe for themselves, namely, by applying purifications and incantations, and enforcing abstinence from baths and many articles of food which are unwholesome to men in diseases...

But the brain is the cause of this affection, as it is of other very great diseases, and in what manner and from what cause it is formed, I will now plainly declare... Some say that we think with the heart, and that this is the part which is grieved, and experiences care. But it is not so; only it contracts like the diaphragm, and still more so for the same causes. For veins from all parts of the body run to it, and it has valves, so as to as to perceive if any pain or pleasurable emotion befall the man. For when grieved the body necessarily shudders, and is contracted, and from excessive joy it is affected in like manner. Wherefore the heart and the diaphragm are particularly sensitive, they have nothing to do, however, with the operations of the understanding, but of all these the brain is the cause...

To be sure, some of Hippocrates’ hypotheses weren’t well tested (e.g., from his book *Aphorisms*, Section V, #42, there is his: “A woman with child, if it be a male, has a good color, but if a female, she has a bad color”!), but even

⁶ Hippocrates seems to be describing epilepsy, because later in this “book” he writes: “But such persons as are habituated to the disease know beforehand when they are about to be seized and flee from men; if their own house be at hand, they run home, but if not, to a deserted place, where as few persons as possible will see them falling, and they immediately cover themselves up. This they do from shame of the affection, and not from fear of the divinity, as many suppose. And little children at first fall down wherever they may happen to be, from inexperience. But when they have been often seized, and feel its approach beforehand, they flee to their mothers, or to any other person they are acquainted with, from terror and dread of the affection, for being still infants they do not know yet what it is to be ashamed.”

so, his enduring legacy to humanism is his valiant attempts to apply the scientific method to suppress ignorance, to advance knowledge, and to apply this increased knowledge to benefit humanity. As he wrote in his famous *Oath*: “I will follow that system of regimen which, according to my ability and judgment, I consider for the benefit of my patients, and abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous.”

Even today, members of the medical “profession” still “profess” the *Hippocratic Oath*, albeit in an altered form, which as you can find on the internet, includes:⁷

I will respect the hard-won scientific gains of those physicians in whose steps I walk, and gladly share such knowledge as is mine with those who are to follow... I will not be ashamed to say, “I know not”, nor will I fail to call in my colleagues when the skills of another are needed for a patient’s recovery...

Similarly, a modern rendition of Hippocrates’ idea that “There are in fact two things, science and opinion; the former begets knowledge, the latter, ignorance”, coupled with Socrates’ idea that “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance” would probably yield something similar to:

Normally, very little good and sometimes great evil result from actions based on opinions derived from ignorant speculations; in contrast, rarely undesirable consequences and more likely substantial good results from actions based on opinions derived from applying the scientific method (guess, test, and reassess) – provided that the basic rights of all humans are vigorously protected.

Yet, in spite of what Hippocrates and Socrates saw, all organized religions continue to be based on “opinions derived from ignorant speculations” – the topic to which I now turn.

EXposing Stupidity

Now, Dear, I don’t want to go into details, here; I’ll go into many in the “excursion” Yx (dealing with “Your Indoctrination in the Mountainous God Lie”). Instead, for now, let me just ask you to consider two summary assessments: one is that science is much older than religion, and the second is that all organized religions are nothing but colossal scientific mistakes.

⁷ From http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/doctors/oath_modern.html.

First, that the need to test hypothesis by performing experiments is much older than speculations about any gods follows from observations of your dog, cat, or any other animal, who probably haven't yet got around to speculating about any gods – discounting the possibility that some dogs might “conclude” that we humans are gods! Thus, if you give your dog something that looks edible, he'll test to see if it is; if you give your cat a new toy, she'll test to see how it reacts when she paws it; before a horse can be ridden, it will test the consequences of having a rider – and so on, for monkeys and apes using sticks to get termites, prehistoric humans using fire, spears, bows and arrows, etc. I therefore trust you agree, Dear, that science (testing hypotheses *via* experimentation) is much older than religion.

As for all religions being colossal scientific failures, perhaps these failures first occurred with the misidentification of causes: that a volcano erupted because the god of the volcano wanted a human sacrifice, that thunder and lightning occurred because the sky god was angry, that a flood occurred because some god or other was displeased with so much murder and mayhem, that disease occurred because suitable “offerings” hadn't been made to the gods, that an infirmity occurred because the patient was inhabited by some evil spirit, and so on it went – and continues today! Thus, still today, pious Jews wail to their “creator god” for their failure to follow “his” laws, pious Christians beg forgiveness for their “sins”, pious Muslims pray five times per day for Allah's guidance, and pious Mormons seem never to tire of telling their “testimonies” confirming the “truth” of their (comic) book. And in each-and-every case, any scientist worth her salt sees it all as nothing but ignorance: a bunch of silly, untested and untestable speculations concocted by savages, promoted by fools and con artists, and adopted by ignoramuses.

The following 30 December 2004 Reuters report related to the tsunami that drowned more than 150,000 people illustrates that such stupidity not only continues but is rampant. I've added some notes in “square brackets”.

Faiths Ask of Quake: ‘Why Did You Do This, God?’

By Peter Graff

LONDON (Reuters) – It is one of the oldest, most profound questions, posed by some of the most learned minds [cough, cough] of every faith throughout the course of human history.

It was put eloquently this week by an old woman in a devastated village in southern India's Tamil Nadu state. "Why did you do this to us, God?" she wailed. "What did we do to upset you?"

Perhaps no event in living memory has confronted so many of the world's great religions [cough, cough] with such a basic test of faith as this week's tsunami, which indiscriminately slaughtered Indonesian Muslims, Indian Hindus, Thai and Sri Lankan Buddhists, and tourists who were Christians and Jews.

In temples, mosques, churches and synagogues across the globe, clerics are being called upon to explain: How could a benevolent god visit such horror on ordinary people?

Traditionalists of diverse faiths described the destruction as part of god's plan, proof of his power, and punishment for human sins. [The same old con game.]

"This is an expression of God's great ire with the world," Israeli chief rabbi Shlomo Amar told Reuters. "The world is being punished for wrongdoing – be it people's needless hatred of each other, lack of charity, moral turpitude." [Either that or the tsunami was caused by slippage of tectonic plates, which in turn move because of convection of heat (from radioactive decay) from the Earth's interior to its surface.]

Pandit Harikrishna Shastri, a priest of New Delhi's huge marble and sandstone Birla Hindu temple, told Reuters the disaster was caused by a "huge amount of pent-up man-made evil on earth" and driven by the positions of the planets. [Ever hear of plate tectonics?!]

Azizan Abdul Razak, a Muslim cleric and vice president of Malaysia's Islamic opposition party, *Parti Islam se-Malaysia*, said the disaster was a reminder from god that "he created the world and can destroy the world." [Unless, of course, one plate slipped beneath another, causing a large wave in the ocean.]

Sheikh Ibrahim Mogra, a leading British Muslim cleric from Leicester in England said: "We believe that God has ultimate controlling power over his entire creation. We have a responsibility to try and attract god's kindness and mercy and not do anything that would attract his anger." [And would he get angry, I wonder, if people realize that he doesn't exist?!]

END OF TIME?

Many faiths believe that disasters foretell the end of time or the coming of a Messiah. Some Christians expect chaos and destruction as foretold in the Bible's final book, *Revelation*.

Maria, a 32-year-old Jehovah's Witness in Cyprus who believes that the apocalypse is coming said people who once slammed the door in her face were stopping to listen.

“It is a sign of the last days,” she said... [Either that, or a sign that the tectonic plates continue to move.]

(Additional reporting by Michele Kambas in Cyprus, Dan Williams in Jerusalem and Reuters correspondents in New Delhi and Kuala Lumpur)

What astounding stupidity. Such “modern” humans are no more scientifically knowledgeable than the Neanderthals!

Further, Dear, that all religions are nothing but colossal scientific stupidity, that all priests are nothing but purveyors of ignorance, was seen and described in his own way by Aesop, approximately 2500 years ago, in his fable⁸

The Cobbler Turned Doctor: A Cobbler unable to make a living by his trade and made desperate by poverty, began to practice medicine in a town in which he was unknown. He sold a drug, pretending that it was an antidote to all poisons, and obtained a great name for himself by long-winded puffs and advertisements. When the Cobbler happened to fall sick himself of a serious illness, the Governor of the town determined to test his skill. For this purpose he called for a cup, and while filling it with water, pretended to mix poison with the Cobbler’s antidote, commanding him to drink it on the promise of a reward. The Cobbler, under the fear of death, confessed that he had no knowledge of medicine, and was only made famous by the stupid clamors of the crowd. The Governor then called a public assembly and addressed the citizens: “Of what folly have you been guilty? You have not hesitated to entrust your heads to a man whom no one could employ to make even the shoes for their feet.”

Please, Dear, think about this fable – and think about the demands made on you since you were a child that you must “entrust your head [to clerics] whom no one [who is scientifically literate] would employ to make even the shoes for their feet.”

If you think about it, Dear, I hope you’ll see that all “modern” clerics are nothing but spokesmen for primitive scientists, philosophers, logicians, lawyers, and medical professionals. For example (and with most quotations taken from Aiken’s collection):

- Being spokesmen of primitive science, all clerics “religiously” cling to a “scientific model” of the universe that was concocted by savages, that

⁸ Again from <http://classics.mit.edu/>.

doesn't have a scrap of data to support it, and that has zero predictive capability. As Chester Dolan wrote:

Until religionists can give up their use of the word 'truth' to apply to whatever it suits their fancies to so label, to declarations that can in no way be verified by experience and therefore with no restrictions on their proliferation, there will be no reconciliation of science and religion [or maybe better: "no reconciliation of modern science and the speculations of savages"].

- Being spokesmen of primitive philosophies, all clerics "believe" with "faith" that they have found "the truth". But as the philosopher Bertrand Russell wrote:

We may define 'faith' as the firm belief in something for which there is no evidence. Where there is evidence, no one speaks of 'faith'. We do not speak of faith that two and two are four or that the earth is round. We only speak of faith when we wish to substitute emotion for evidence... The most savage controversies are those about matters as to which there is no good evidence either way. Persecution is used in theology, not in arithmetic, because in arithmetic there is knowledge, but in theology there is only opinion.

- Being spokesmen for primitive logicians, all clerics rely on their ridiculous "proofs" of their propositions (such as those about the existence of their gods). But as Robert Wilson wrote in his 1990 book *Quantum Psychology*:

People have murdered each other, in massive wars and guerilla actions, for many centuries, and still murder each other in the present, over ideologies and religions which, stated as propositions, appear neither true nor false to modern logicians – [they are nothing but] meaningless propositions that look meaningful to the linguistically naive.

- Being spokesmen for primitive lawyers and lawmakers, all clerics [clinging to their "holy" (law) books and charging outrageous "legal fees" (a tenth of one's before-taxes income, for life!)] proceed to instruct people on "moral laws" to govern their lives and penalties for breaking these "laws". But as Michael Shermer wrote in his 2004 book *The Science of Good and Evil*:

...religion codified these [existing] moral principles for sound reasons that have nothing to do with "divine inspiration". These moral sentiments and principles came first, evolving over the course of a hundred thousand years of humans living in a Paleolithic environment [and even longer, for dolphins and monkeys!].

Religion came second, co-opting morality and codifying it to its own end, all of which happened in just the past couple of thousand years.

- And although at least some (but not all) of the spokesmen for primitive medical professionals have apparently given up practicing curing illnesses by “laying on of hands” and by “exorcising evil spirits”, most clerics still consider themselves qualified psychologists, proposing to guide people to happiness and the “well being of their immortal souls”. But as George Bernard Shaw wrote:

The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality.

All of which leads me to ask you, Dear, to reconsider the wisdom in Mangasarian’s assessment: “Religion is the science of children; science is the religion of adults.” I’d even “up the ante” on that one, by saying: “Religion is the science of savages; science is the religion of humans.”

Alternatively, Dear, consider this. In contrast to all religions, the “priests” of modern societies – the “priests” of scientific humanism – are qualified scientists, engineers, medical professionals, lawyers, logicians, etc. (as well as competent police officers, politicians, entertainers, and so on). In contrast, theocrats are technocrats of defunct technologies!

And maybe it would be useful if I tried to describe the problem in still different words, because I can essentially guarantee you that, more than once during your life, you’ll run into some major stupidity dealing with “science vs. religion” or “the controversy between science and religion” or similar. I call it “major stupidity”, because the controversy should never have been labeled science vs. religion. It always has been and always will be a controversy between good vs. bad science, between respectable vs. disgraceful science, between correcting errors vs. being stuck in error, between progress (*via* science) vs. stagnation (in religion), between helping vs. hurting humanity. The English poet Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) stated the case clearly in his essay “The Necessity of Atheism”:

If we wish to explain our ideas of the Divinity we shall be obliged to admit that, by the word God, man has never been able to designate but the most hidden, the most distant, and the most unknown cause of the effects which he saw; he has made use of his word only when the play of natural and known causes ceased to be visible to him; as soon as he lost the thread of these causes, or when his mind could no longer follow

the chain, he cut the difficulty and ended his researches by calling God the last of the causes, that is to say, that which is beyond all causes that he knew; thus he but assigned a vague denomination to an unknown cause, at which his laziness or the limits of his knowledge forced him to stop.

Every time we say that God is the author of some phenomenon, that signifies that we are ignorant of how such a phenomenon was able to operate by the aid of forces or causes that we know in nature. It is thus that the generality of mankind, whose lot is ignorance, attributes to the Divinity, not only the unusual effects which strike them, but moreover the most simple events, of which the causes are the most simple to understand by whomever is able to study them. In a word, man has always respected unknown causes, surprising effects that his ignorance kept him from unraveling. It was on this debris of nature that man raised the imaginary colossus of the Divinity.

What Shelley described is now commonly called “the god of the gaps.” As a recent illustration, consider the following Associated Press (AP) report (by an unidentified reporter) dated 24 November 2004.

Pope Receives Honorary Degree in Poland

VATICAN CITY (AP) – Pope John Paul II received an honorary degree Tuesday from Nicholas Copernicus University in his native Poland, calling it a “sign of dialogue” between science and faith.

The pope received the rector [president] and faculty members from the university in Torun, Poland, the astronomer’s birthplace, which John Paul visited in 1999. That visit came nearly four centuries after the Vatican condemned Copernicus’ discovery that the Earth revolved around the sun.

The pope said then that science and religion were still grappling to find common ground in the “service of truth” [cough, cough] and stressed again Tuesday that men of culture had “the responsibility of truth, to strive toward it, to defend it and to live according to it.”

He said it was necessary “for men and women not to walk alone but to try to confirm their own intuition through dialogue with others when reaching the truth on their own.”

In 1992, the pope formally proclaimed that the church erred when it condemned Galileo for supporting Copernicus’ theory, which had been denounced in 1616 as dangerous for the faith. Copernicus’ book, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium*, remained on the church’s Index of prohibited books until 1822.

Now, I don’t plan to dwell on the obvious idiocy that it took until 1992 for the Catholic Church to acknowledge that all the popes since 1616 were

wrong about the postulates of Copernicus and Galileo that the Earth wasn't at the center of the solar system (conflicting with the Vatican's claim that the Pope is "infallible")⁹, but Dear, please consider again the idiotic statement in the above: "He [Pope John Paul II] said it was necessary 'for men and women not to walk alone but to try to confirm their own intuition through dialogue with others when reaching the truth on their own'."

The stupid pope "thinks" that "truth" can be reached? He doesn't know that 'truth' can be approached only asymptotically in an open system? The fool thinks that 'truth' can be reached by 'intuition'. Has he never heard of the scientific method of experimentally testing predictions derived from succinct hypotheses that summarize a substantial quantity of data? Instead, the ignoramus advises people "to try to confirm their own intuition through dialogue with others when reaching the truth on their own"?! Rather than confirm predictions *via* experiments, he propose that people "reach" the "truth" *via* "dialogue" to "confirm their own intuition"?! Mind boggling stupidity!!

Please, people, try to save the world from such stupidity. Such nonsense stimulates the "intellectually challenged" to "think" that they are in possession of "the truth" – and worse, to claim knowledge of, cling to, and become obnoxious and even belligerent about their "truth". Rather than as claimed in the Bible that "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free", their "truth" enslaves them! As Robert Ingersoll wrote:

⁹ Yet, Dear, in case you wonder how it was rationalized, here is a rationalization written by Sonnie Ekwowusi in an article entitled *The Pope at 25*, which was published on 16 November 2004 and which you can find at <http://www.thisdayonline.com/archive/2003/10/15/20031015com01.html>:

"Another seemingly irreconcilable detente, which this Pope has resolved, is the detente between science and faith. In 1992 the commission of experts set up by the Pope in 1979 to reexamine the case of Galileo Galilei and his heliocentric Copernicanism came out with its report. The churchmen at that time who condemned Galileo had thought that Copernicanism was anti-scriptural. But the Pope's commission said the Churchmen erred in condemning Galileo. Now, can it said that the opposition to Galileo's Copernicanism by the churchmen at that time was intended to be imposed on [the] Church as a dogma of faith which was later found to be untrue and so contradicted Papal infallibility? No. The commission ruled that the judgment of the Tribunal at that time was not a decree *ex cathedra* constituting a dogma of faith and binding on the Church. Succinctly put, the opposition to Copernicanism did not void Papal infallibility because the opposition was neither a dogma nor a truth solemnly defined by the Church. Besides, the Tribunal and its members that condemned Galileo and Copernicanism lacked the *locus standi* and competence to do so, being that they went beyond the realm faith, which is their competence, and delved into scientific matters, which is not their field and competence."

There are some truths, however, that we should never forget: superstition has always been the relentless enemy of science; faith has been a hater of demonstration; hypocrisy has been sincere only in its dread of truth, and all religions are inconsistent with mental freedom.

But meanwhile, let me try to recompose myself and move on to the next subsection in this chapter, dealing with

EXposing “Reprehensible Ignorance”

Although it’s unclear to me if Socrates ever saw that the key to knowledge was the scientific method, he did see something else of fundamental importance. Thus, while awaiting his execution (after he was convicted of the trumped-up charge “Socrates is guilty of not believing in the gods in which the state believes, but brings in other new divinities; he also wrongs by corrupting the youth”), Socrates reportedly said (to which I’ve added the italics):

To fear death, gentlemen, is nothing else than to think one is wise when one is not; for it is thinking one knows what one does not know. For no one knows whether death be not even the greatest of all blessings to man, but they fear it as if they knew that is the greatest of evils. *And is not this the most reprehensible form of ignorance, that of thinking one knows what one does not know?*

I hope you will pause to consider the brilliance of his statement that I repeat here in a declarative form:

...the most reprehensible form of ignorance [is] that of thinking one knows what one does not know.

I think that Socrates’ word ‘reprehensible’ is highly appropriate, because “thinking one knows what one does not know” usually leads to arrogance – and there is little that is more ‘reprehensible’ than arrogant ignorance, which is the hallmark of all religions.

Similar was said a hundred years earlier by Confucius (551–479 BCE):

While you do not know life, how can you know about death? While you are unable to serve men [i.e., help humanity], how can you serve spirits [or the gods]... *When you know a thing, to hold that you know it; and when you do not know a thing, to allow that you do not know it – this is knowledge [also translated as: “this is the beginning of wisdom”].*

Consistent with these assessments of Socrates and Confucius, the main thesis of these X-chapters, Dear, is that the root cause of a large fraction of the problems in the world is what Socrates called “the most reprehensible form of ignorance”, i.e., “thinking one knows what one does not know” – the most prevalent examples of which occur in all organized religions.

From a scientific perspective, all views of the god idea reveal its stupidity:

- *The Scientific View:* From a scientific perspective, ‘God’ is an abbreviation for “I dunno”. It’s dumb; it’s just a silly speculation. There’s zero evidence that any god created the universe (or humans or anything else), the probability that any god could exist is about 1 part in 10^{500} , but the god idea certainly has caused a humongous amount of trouble in the world!
- *The Mystical View:* In this view, “God is love” or similar (e.g., God is a feeling of happiness, of hope, of love, of unity with others and even with the entire universe). But from a scientific humanist’s perspective, such a “God” is then a metaphor for various emotions – and again, it’s a mistake: people would be much further ahead by focusing on specific emotions (e.g., *via* meditation), working toward goals associated with such emotions (e.g., helping humanity), and learning about the wonders of the universe (e.g., *via* scientific studies).
- *The Political view:* In this view, “God” is a tool to “keep the rabble in line.” But from a scientific humanist’s perspective, that view is again a mistake: better (by far) is to help educate the people to think critically, so that they’ll hold opinions only as strongly as relevant evidence warrants. In contrast, the God idea is a tool used by parasites to mooch off producers – and for power mongers to lead the people in whatever manner such megalomaniacs desire.

Consequently, if the pieces are put together (putting together Socrates’ summary that “There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance”, Socrates’ assessment that “the most reprehensible form of ignorance [is] thinking one knows what one does not know”, Hippocrates’ idea that “[science] begets knowledge [whereas opinion based on speculation begets] ignorance”, and Goethe’s assessment that “Nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action”), the result can be written in a form similar to the following.

Humans have yet to find any 'good' that surpasses the scientific method – and have engaged in nothing more evil, nothing more reprehensible, nothing that has led to such terrible consequences as actions derived from ignorant speculations, such as those at the base of all organized religions.

Let me try to put it another way. If science is permitted to operate freely, it's self-correcting: errors are eventually found and eliminated, and inadequate models are abandoned. But what happens (even sometimes in modern science but always in the prehistoric science called religion) is that some "orthodoxy" becomes established and attempts to control "knowledge", to maintain the *status quo*. This orthodoxy maintains that they know what they do not know – the most reprehensible ignorance.

Eventually, some progress is usually made. For example, after hundreds of years of effort, scientists (committed to helping humanity understand this universe and to using this understanding to benefit mankind) have been able to convince at least some of the clerics to abandon their long-held opinions (based on zero data, yet which they defended by torturing and murdering those who questioned their opinions!) and thereby to accept the overwhelming evidence that the world is spherical, that it encircles the sun, that people evolved, that diseases and infirmities have understandable causes, etc. And please, Dear, don't read that previous sentence with a smile; instead, think of the heroes who, for suggesting such ideas, were tortured and murdered by the ignorant, arrogant clerics.

Still today, unfortunately, scientists have been unable to convince the ignorant, arrogant clerics that all their speculations about the existences of immortal souls, spirits, various gods, etc., are meaningless – probably because, once the clerics agree to abandon their stagnant "science", then their quackery will be exposed, their con game will collapse, and they'll need to join the ranks of the producers. Voltaire saw it clearly, ~200 years ago:

A clergyman is one who feels himself called upon to live without working – at the expense of the rascals who work to live.

But showing that I have no hard feelings, I here-and-now express my willingness (even my eagerness) to pay taxes to ensure all lower-level clerics

are provided with shovels and that all clerical leaders are provided with sledgehammers and ample supplies of boulders!

H.L. Mencken (1880–1956) summarized it well in his 1930 book *Treatise on the Gods* (quoted here from Aiken's collection):

[E]very priest who really understands the nature of his business is well aware that science is its natural and implacable enemy... Christian theology, like every other theology, is not only opposed to the scientific spirit; it is also opposed to all other attempts at rational thinking. Not by accident does *Genesis 3* make the father of knowledge a serpent – slimy, sneaking, and abominable.

Since the earliest days the church as an organization has thrown itself violently against every effort to liberate the body and mind of man. It has been, at all times and everywhere, the habitual and incorrigible defender of bad governments, bad laws, bad social theories, bad institutions. It was, for centuries, an apologist for slavery, as it was the apologist for the divine right of kings.

Actually, though, it's not been a fight between science and religion, but between competent scientists and incompetent scientists (the latter commonly called clerics). To promote their con games, the clerics concocted a monstrous cauldron full of mistakes and lies, and use their brew to drug the people – and then ensnare the people's minds in chains of mystic thought. Meanwhile, scientists have been searching for keys to understanding – keys with which the people can overcome their addiction to the clerics' drugs and break free from the clerics' chains.

EXposing Evil

To begin to try to show you the resulting evils caused by the arrogant ignorance of all clerics, Dear, let me suggest an analogy to driving my old truck – at which you became quite competent by the time you were ten! Claiming to be custodians of their culture's wisdom, values, morals, and “holy rites”, the ignorant clergy in all societies attempt to steer their societies – while looking in the rear-view mirror! Now, driving while looking in the rear-view mirror works fairly well when backing up (as did Europe in the Dark Ages, when the clerics were in control, and is currently occurring in Islamic societies, with their clerics in control). But, Dear, in case I forgot to tell you when I was teaching you how to drive, it's quite dangerous to try to drive forward while looking only in the rear-view mirror! While trying to drive forward in a changing world, it's imperative to look ahead and to change direction in response to changing circumstance. It's true that, on

occasion, one should glance in the rear-view mirror (e.g., to see if someone is gaining on you and plans to pass), but otherwise, you should keep your eyes on the road ahead and act accordingly, using your brain as best you can.

Or to see the clerics' stupidities another way, consider another analogy – although, at the outset, I admit the possibility that it will sound so stupid that you'll have difficulty “believing” that anyone or any group could be so dumb. But anyway, consider the possibility that one group of people “believes” in the reality of one comic-book character (for example, Yahweh or, say, Superman), another group “believes” in the reality of another comic-book character (Jesus or, say, the Lone Ranger), and still other groups “believe” in still other comic-book characters (e.g., in the case of the Muslims, the “angel” Gabriel or, say, Batman, and in the case of Mormons, the “angel” Moroni or, say, Robin) – and the different groups harass, bully, persecute, and even murder each other (in some cases, continuing for thousands of years) because of these different “beliefs”! And even today, the murders and wars over such stupidity continue.

And if that stupidity isn't mind-boggling enough, think of the stupidity of one group of people (Jews, Christians, Muslims – you name them) who all (stupidly enough) believe in the reality of the same-story book character (e.g., the Lone Ranger), but they subsequently formed subgroups, e.g., in the case of the Jews, subgroups included the Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and others; in the case of subsequent Christians, subgroups include members of the “Holy Roman Catholic Church”, members of the Greek Orthodox Church, Lutherans, Calvinists, Baptists, Mormons, and others; and in the case of Muslims, there are Shias (e.g., in Iran), Sunnis (e.g., in Egypt and most Muslim nations), and Wahhabis (e.g., Saudi Arabia) and others, and these subgroups proceeded and still continue to discriminate, ostracize, terrorize, brutalize, torture, murder, and slaughter the families of other subgroup members – whose only difference in beliefs are in the name of the Lone Ranger's horse, or his horse's color, or the shape of the saddle, or the type of bridle, or...

In the case of the Christian subgroups, they burned people at the stake, they asked children to make a sign of the cross and if the child did it “the wrong way” (members of the Catholic Church do it from left to right, whereas members the Greek Orthodox Church do it from right to left), they would slit the child's throat... And for what? Difference in “beliefs” about the

color of Lone Ranger's horse!! It's beyond ignorance; it's beyond stupid; it's criminally insane: insane people conned by criminal clerics.

And okay, so maybe you're starting to think that I'm "losing my cool." If so, Dear, consider another fable from Aesop, who must have seen it too:

The Trumpeter Taken Prisoner: A Trumpeter, bravely leading on the soldiers, was captured by the enemy. He cried out to his captors, "Pray spare me, and do not take my life without cause or without inquiry. I have not slain a single man of your troop. I have no arms, and carry nothing but this one brass trumpet." "That is the very reason for which you should be put to death," they said; "for, while you do not fight yourself, your trumpet stirs all the others to battle."

And if you don't see what I see in that fable, Dear, then please reread it, substituting the word 'cleric' for 'trumpeter', and "holy book" (or "comic book") for 'trumpet'.

For more details, consider the following list of some evils done by religions:

- "Holy books" are used to "guide" people in various societies, but in reality, the Old Testament is little more than a chronicle of intolerance (resulting in the confiscation of property and the killing of those who disagreed with the clerics' stupid ideas), the New Testament is the source of the torture and murder of millions of "infidels", the Quran is the source of innumerable "Jihads" to slaughter "unbelievers", the Book of Mormon is the source of Mormon murders and massacres, and so on.
- Given that everything based on the "supernatural" is either an enormous mistake (made by prehistoric "scientists") or a colossal lie (concocted by conniving con artists), expect no good to result. For a society to accept that anything is "supernatural", to view reality as an illusion, is the height of foolishness. It's a group delusion, in which individuals in the group reinforce the delusions of others. Any group that thrives on such delusions is then potentially a mob, capable of being led (by anyone capable of manipulating the deluded) into anything, from mutilating young girls (so that they will never enjoy sexual intercourse) to burning millions of other humans in incinerators (because they participate in different delusions) and to waging any type of "holy war" that their clerics proclaim (to protect their con games).

- To single out a specific monstrous problem, caused by essentially every organized religion (each in its own way), consider racism. For example, the con game called Judaism is to “sell” the involvement with the creator of the universe not of the individual but of the entire Jewish people (the Old Testament repeatedly states that the Israelites are God’s chosen race – just as the Pygmies were told that they are the chosen race of their god). The to-be-expected result is for Jewish people to be racist. But then any struggling group (such as the Germans after World War I) will be susceptible to any delusion offered to explain why they (convinced, as most people are, that they are important) are so downtrodden. Thereby, Hitler (with the help of the writings of Martin Luther, who in turn claimed support for his racism from the New Testament – rather than from the Old Testament) was able to convince the German people that the cause of their problems was the racist Jews! And thus the stupidity of it all: the Jews arrogantly assumed that they were superior, based on the assumption that the Old Testament was “true”, while the Nazis assumed that they were superior, based on the assumption that the New Testament was “true” (just as Muslims and Mormons assume that their “holy books” are “true”) – with none of them having sufficient skepticism or intelligence or courage (or all of those) to see that the concept of “truth” is applicable only to closed systems and that the concept of “holy” is meaningless.
- Danger continues from the concentrations of so much power (over others) in the leaders of the bureaucracies that create and maintain the illusions being sold to their followers, who follow their suppliers like drug addicts. The drugs that these religious fiends are selling delude the user with the illusion of importance (the possessor of an “immortal” soul, the ability to communicate directly with the creator of the universe, and so on). Under the influence of such drugs, deluded automata can be programmed into extremely destructive behavior, including terrorism.
- And besides such real and apparent physical-dangers from organized religions, their promoting patently ludicrous concepts cause many other and more subtle dangers, in turn caused by promoting a society’s stagnation in an otherwise changing world. Thereby, organized religions are potentially major obstructions to solving real social problems (e.g., overpopulation), obstructing (and in many cases, doing as best they can to prevent) society from addressing real problems scientifically. If people accept one lie, they’re more susceptible to accepting others; and if

people are deluded by one con game, then they'll more likely buy into others (e.g., that abortion "cheapens" lives, whereas the real de-evaluation of life is from oversupply, i.e., overpopulation).

- And if there were nothing else, of course there's the fact that organized religions are a huge waste of any society's resources, funding a next-to-useless bureaucracy. Even if some members provide some useful social functions (e.g., helping the poor and dealing with society's rituals), typically these functions could be performed better by people trained more appropriately.

Further, Dear, there can be some scary and really horrible consequences of the human propensity to minimize unknowns if, rather than increase understanding, people just reduce the number of unknowns (e.g., by "believing" in god and then accepting a phrase such as the familiar "God works in mysterious ways").

One scary concept is that so many people are still so primitive: they still don't understand thunder, lightning, fire, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, birth, death, etc., so they still accept the 10,000 year old myths as "explanations"! The horrible consequences mostly follow when people stop relying on their own abilities to face unknowns. When people accept interpretations provided by some huckster (shaman, priest, parson, rabbi, imam, and similar), then that huckster (who claims direct contact with the god or gods) will claim even more knowledge and will start to direct the lives of the "faithful followers" (of course for a price), telling them what to wear, how to eat, when and how to have sex, who their enemies are, how to torture and murder, and so on.

To "top it off" – to top off their arrogant ignorance – what really "gets to me" is that all clerics are such astounding hypocrites: they preach humility (normally they even feign humility when preaching humility!) but they practice astounding hubris. To see what I mean, Dear, consider first: what could be more arrogant than to assume that one knows anything whatsoever about any god?! If the priests practiced the humility that they preach, think of answers that they would give to questions such as the following:

- What's God's purpose? Answer: "I dunno."
- Why did God make humans? Answer: "Beat's me!"
- What's does God want us to do? Answer: "Who knows?"

- Did God truly give us commandments? “Your guess is as good as mine.”
- What happens when we die? “How the devil should I know?”
- Is there anything to all this business about Heaven and Hell? “Yah... it’s a business, a lot like selling snake oil.”

Sorry, Dear – you know I get carried away – but please do spend a little time thinking about the astounding arrogance, ignorance, hypocrisy, and hubris of the clerics of all religions. They’re mentally ill; they need psychiatric help.

Meanwhile, of course all clerics espouse confidence – they must, because the key to making money in any con game is to gain the mark’s confidence. They can’t sheepishly admit that they’re selling illusions! Yet, beyond being confident, they claim with astounding and brazen arrogance not only that they know the unknown (and I know that’s illogical, Dear, but clerics don’t care about logic – unless it suits their purposes) but also claim that they’re the spokesmen for the creator of the universe! How’s that for arrogance – and “the most reprehensible ignorance”, claiming that they know what they don’t – and therefore, the most reprehensible evil.

And I wonder if you see, Dear, why many people consider the pope to be the epitome of evil. It’s not (I’m fairly confident) because they think that he has evil intent; such people probably have concluded (as have I) that all popes have been and still are just bumbling old fools. But, Dear, think of what evil means. Doesn’t evil mean: harming others without cause, violating the principle that everyone has an equal right to claim one’s own existence? In turn, such evil is a manifestation of stupidity, for it’s stupid for anyone to violate the rights of others, since eventually the consequences of these violations will return to violate the rights of the violator, *via* “What goes around comes back around.”

Now, if a person acts stupidly and harms a single other person without cause, certainly that’s evil. More evil occurs if such ignorance leads to similar harm to additional people. And still more evil occurs if worse harm is done to still more people. For example, there was the stupid concept promoted by various leaders from Moses to Hitler that one “race” of humans was “better” than another “race” – with at least one of them certainly demonstrating stupidity in choosing which “race” was “better” and with all of them demonstrating stupidity by adopting the principle that any race was better than any another and by thinking that there is any “race” other than “the human race”.

In general, the more stupid the concept plus the more power the person has to inflict his stupidity on others, then the greater the evil. As Goethe said: “Nothing is more terrible than ignorance in action.” Therefore, perhaps you can see why many people consider the pope to be the epitome of evil: he exercises his “power” (through a huge hierarchy of con artists, selling some life-after-death snake oil) to inflict his arrogant ignorance (thinking he knows what he doesn’t, even claiming “papal infallibility”) to inflict harm on approximately a billion humans (e.g., preventing birth control, resulting in more unwanted children in impoverished families, living in squalor and disease). That surpasses the influences of even Hitler and Stalin, who inflicted their arrogant ignorance on “only” a few hundred million people. Thus, Dear, maybe you can see why some people consider the pope to be the epitome of evil (because he uses his arrogant, reprehensible ignorance, plus his enormous power over a huge number of foolish people, to damage their lives).

But if the case is to be argued, one should also examine the relative harm done to individuals by the pope’s ignorance *versus* the harm done to individuals by the ignorance of other leaders, such as Hitler, Stalin, Saddam Hussein, and George W. Bush. There’re all ‘ideologues’, i.e., people who are more committed to the “truth” of some idea than to the idea of “truth”. Yet, setting aside the complicated task of evaluating the degree of harm done to individuals by different ideologues, notice that the evils that they do are generally proportional to the power they have within their various “isms” (Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Catholicism, Nazism, Communism, Mormonism, and so on). And whereas most religious power now seems to be in Catholicism and Islam, each with about a billion foolish “followers”, then the two most likely candidates for the title of “the most evil ideologue in today’s world” are the pope and the supreme religious leader of Islam (if there is one). In turn, but following far behind them, is the leader of the Mormon Church – not because he isn’t just as arrogantly ignorant, but because he damages the lives of “only” about 10 million people.

Therefore, Dear, if ever you wanted to get serious about identifying the world’s most evil people, then you’d need to do a lot of evaluation: not only to evaluate the “degree of ignorance” of “the evil doers” but also their “degree of influence”, or alternatively, the degree to which they put their ignorance into action and the number of fools who follow them. Thereby, again I think you’d conclude that the leader of the Mormon Church falls far

behind the pope in such a “line of infamy”. And probably interspersed among those two, in this line of infamy, you’d probably find political leaders such as the current President Bush, Prime Minister Blair, the leader of Sudan who is responsible for genocide, etc., depending on the degree of their arrogant ignorance, the number of their followers, and the harm they have done to humanity. If this line were to be extended into the past, then I’ll not dwell here on the relative ranking of the arrogant ignorance and evil of Pol Pot, Mao, Stalin, Hitler, Genghis Khan, Muhammad, “Saint” Paul, Moses, and so on, unfortunately including so many others.

All of which is well summarized by other authors, quoted here from Aiken’s collection.

History shows that there is nothing so easy to enslave and nothing so hard to emancipate as ignorance; hence, it becomes the double enemy of civilization. By its servility it is the prey of tyranny, and by its credulity it is the foe of enlightenment. [Lemuel Washburn]

“There is no wild beast like an angry theologian,” observed the Roman Emperor Julian, once the head of the Christian Church. Paganism had never bred such sectarian antipathies, such bigotry or superstition. In the name of divine love and mercy, a reign of terror and cruelty held sway over Christians for centuries. Human charity was so overshadowed that a man could remorselessly burn a fellow man at the stake for a mere technical difference in theology, perhaps in phraseology or translation. [Alvin Boyd Kuhn]

...the world has suffered far less from ignorance than from pretensions to knowledge. It is not skeptics or explorers but fanatics and ideologues who menace decency and progress. No agnostic ever burned anyone at the stake or tortured a pagan, a heretic, or an unbeliever. [Daniel J. Boorstin]

To create a world in which reason is suspect, religious faith is a virtue, and doubt is regarded as sin, is to sanctify ignorance... Not a lack of belief, but adherence to false knowledge is the enemy of progress. And certain that we have found everything worth searching for, we see no point in further search and inquiry. Believing what is unworthy of belief, believing falsehood as if it were incontrovertible truth, and sure that we know everything we will ever need to know, we are worse than ignorant. [Chester Dolan]

Let me tell you that religion is the cruelest fraud ever perpetrated upon the human race. It is the last of the great scheme of thievery that man must legally prohibit so as to protect himself from the charlatans who prey upon the ignorance and fears of the people. The penalty for this type of extortion should be as severe as it is of other forms of dishonesty. [Joseph Lewis]

Thereby, Dear, maybe you see why that old sailor's summary, which I quoted in the Preface, didn't deter me from writing this book. He startled me by summarizing so much, so well: he called the priests of the world "parrots, on a dead branch of knowledge, endlessly repeating the same old lines." But that describes only the stupid clerics who "believe" all the stupidities in all their "holy books". It doesn't describe the clerics who are nothing but con artists (who realize that they're selling snake-oil medicine, but who continue to sell it, because it's easier than working for a living). And most significantly, it doesn't describe all the evil that all clerics have done, damaging so many lives.

Years ago, when I began to see the extent of clerical evil, then when I was walking (and I always carry pencil and paper in my pocket), I would jot down my own "one liners". Some of these I still remember in "M" or "P" when I'm walking (depending on my mood, derived from recent experiences), but which I didn't show you in those earlier chapters – because I was worried that you would conclude that I was "losing my cool"! But for your information, let me show you some of my notes (in which you might notice all the "M's" and "P's"):

- A monarchical, absolute morality is moronic.
- Moses, Muhammad, all the miserable mythmakers, and all those who perpetrated (and still perpetrate) such myths were (and still are) murders of the human spirit.
- The limit of immorality is the "morality" of the mystics: Moses, Muhammad, and all the others, from Zoroaster through "Saint" Paul and Joseph Smith. Reduce their hideous commandments to one word and it's: obey! The only "absolute morality" for humans is the one capability that distinguishes us from animals: evaluate!
- The highest moral value: use your brain as best you can. Priests are not only immoral (not thinking for themselves – save for thinking of themselves!), they are evil: trying to get others to stop thinking for themselves, replacing thinking with believing. The most evil: religious leaders such as the pope, because added to their immorality (their stupidity) is their power mongering.

- Linking moral codes, especially “absolute” moral codes, to any “supernatural” is for morons, schizophrenics, and power mongers (that is, those who tighten their stranglehold on society by manipulating the myths of the mystics).
- The hideousness of all organized religions is the horrible harm they have done to humans, hoodwinking animals with the ability to think into becoming flocks of “faithful” sheep.
- The mission of any religious “missionary”? To convert people from thinking to believing. It’s evil!
- The damnable priests: the stupid ones (“parrots on a dead branch of knowledge, endlessly repeating the same old lines”), the crazy ones (with their delusions of grandeur), and the evil ones (not just parrots but vultures, perched on a dead branch of knowledge, plotting their attack on their next human victim).
- All priests of the world (clergymen, pastors, preachers, priests, bishops, rabbis, imams, mullahs, ayatollahs) are parasites, spreading the most horrible pestilence the world has ever known; they’re leeches, sucking the life blood from their societies; like ticks, they burrow into the brains of their victims. They should be fed what they’ve earned: our scorn and disgust.
- The priests of the world are like piranhas, preying on producers. Pompous, pedantic asses polluting the world with their pornographic propaganda and profanity. All of them. What they’re selling ranges from placebos (at best) to (more commonly) pernicious poison, polluting the world. A pox on all their houses: may they find and dwell in the everlasting hell that they invented to enslave humanity.
- The fundamental premiss of the priests is that people are too stupid to think for themselves. But with this idiotic premiss, at least their actions follow logically: if the people are too stupid to think for themselves, then let’s train them to obey! What a horrible insult to humanity: “Obey, and standby for further instructions, just like good little warriors.” With their “great führer”, they command their followers to obey!

- They want you to join in their game of make believe (to “make life tolerable” – which means that the most troubled are the most vulnerable): a game of make believe in which they make the rules – favoring them. And it may be okay, at least for a while, until it confronts reality: the result has been tortures, murders, and wars.
- People of the world, unite against the exterminators of humanity: they preach poison; their contribution is worse than useless; their propaganda pollutes our young with the horrible chant: “Don’t think, obey.” Theirs is the ultimate “bait and switch”: they offer “life after death” and supply “death in life”. They want followers – to follow along their path of racism, intolerance, and war. Without them, humans can learn of the brotherhood of all mankind, which will lead to peace.
- As it says in the Bible: “priests feed on the sins of the people.” I, on the other hand, no longer have any sins – I didn’t make the payments, so the church reclaimed them!

But, Dear, as I wrote at the start of this chapter, over the past decade I’ve been “mellowing out”: it seems to me now that the majority of clerics are just fools. Yet, still I would have you consider the following comparisons:

Priest: “Obey, or else.”

Person: “Or else what?”

Priest: “God will...”

Person: “You’ve gotta be kidding!”

Politician: “Obey, or else.”

Person: “Or else what?”

Politician: “Fine, imprisonment, death... The full weight of the state.”

Person: “But what if the law is wrong?”

Humanist: “Obey what you’ve evaluated to be right.”

Person: “Why?”

Humanist: “To live as best you can.”

Person: “Hmmm. Let me think about that.”

If you will “think about that”, Dear, then maybe you, too, will see that “belief” in god, any god, is immoral.

And in contrast to the immorality perpetrated by all religions and the task of identifying who is the most notorious “evil doer”, consider the much more pleasant task of identifying who has been the most helpful to humanity. To begin to try to evaluate such candidates, a list of potential nominees could probably be well started by listing the names of all Nobel laureates, who each year have been recognized for having “conferred the greatest benefit on mankind.” In addition, though, I wouldn’t overlook as candidates some movie directors and entertainers, because some of them have made great contributions to our understanding ourselves (and perhaps you’ll pardon me if, on such a list, I would include the names of candidates such as Audrey Hepburn, Louie Armstrong, Barbara Streisand, Bill Cosby, Nat King Cole, Sam Cook, Celine Dion, Ella Fitzgerald, Elvis,...). As for determining the relative good done by people in the past [including “entertainers” (from Bacon and Beethoven, to Horace and Homer, to Shakespeare and Shin-eqi-unninni, and to Volney and Voltaire) as well as those whose intellectual achievements still shine (from the person who made the first wheel through to Einstein and subsequent others)], I think that the task would be too difficult to accomplish – and you would probably walk away from it, repeating “the only way to pay our debt to the past is to put the future in debt to ourselves”.

And while the subject of ‘walking’ is on your mind...